

WILLIAM MORRIS

Romantic to Revolutionary

E.P. Thompson

Introduction by Peter Linebaugh

William Morris—the great 19th century craftsman, designer, poet and writer—remains a monumental figure whose influence resonates powerfully today. As an intellectual (and author of the seminal utopian novel *News From Nowhere*), his concern with artistic and human values led him to cross what he called the “river of fire” and become a committed socialist—committed not to some theoretical formula but to the day-by-day struggle of working women and men in Britain and to the evolution of his ideas about art, about work, and about how life should be lived. Many of his ideas accorded none too well with the reforming tendencies dominant in the Labour movement, nor with those of “orthodox” Marxism, which has looked elsewhere for inspiration. Both sides have been inclined to venerate Morris rather than to pay attention to what he said. Originally written less than a decade before his groundbreaking *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson brought to this biography his now trademark historical mastery, passion, wit, and essential sympathy. It remains unsurpassed as the definitive work on this remarkable figure, by the major British historian of the 20th century.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward Palmer Thompson (1924–1993), was an English historian, writer, socialist and peace campaigner. He is probably best known today for his historical work on the British radical movements in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in particular his seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Published almost two decades before Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History Of The United States*, he popularized the concept, and practice, of ‘history from below’. He published influential biographies of William Morris and William Blake and was a prolific journalist, polemicist and essayist.

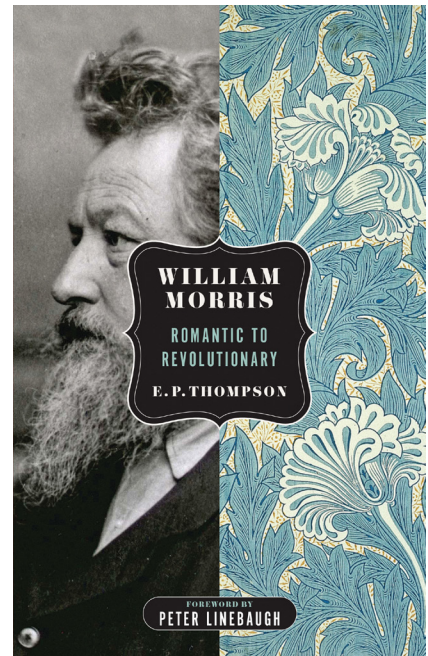
ACCOLADES

“It is not only the standard biography of Morris; it makes us realize, as no other writer has done, how completely admirable a man this Victorian was.”

—Robert Hughes, *Time Magazine*

“Depressed by how many socialists saw only “through the murky smoked glass of the present condition”, he wanted instead “a life in which every human being should find unrestricted scope for his best powers and faculties”. Thompson’s Morris engages with a conundrum even more relevant today. How might we shift from capitalist society as it is to a sustainable and pleasurable “something else”? His book reveals a dynamic yet embedded way of writing the history of socialism, and an interrogation of what socialism might be.”

—Sheila Rowbotham, *The Independent*



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